Superdiverse communicative spaces: transnational migrant communities and their repertoires in the city of Venice

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Superdiverse urban environments (Vertovec 2006) are among the most interesting outcomes of globalized migration flows for sociolinguistic research (Blommaert/Rampton 2011). In Venice, more than a hundred ‘immigrant languages’ are spoken in the city alongside the city’s vernacular, Italian and the languages of the tourists visiting the city.

The current research concentrates on transnational migrants’ communicative spaces – both in the physical and the virtual world. Starting from an analysis of the migrants’ repertoires (cf. Blommaert 2010; Blommaert/Backus 2012), this research elaborates the complex communicative realities faced by transnational migrants. The first focal point of the research is the tension between emotive communication in the migrants’ language(s) – often via telephone or Internet – and the communicative routines in the non-native language at the workplace. A second focal point is the use of translocal relations to provide information, support and goods from the home country; these transnational communication channels are very often created and operated through the use of the migrant’s language(s) (Faist 2000).

The elements of the migrants’ repertoires are used in truly superdiverse communicative spaces:

- The role of the migrant speakers change with their interlocutors – e.g. they are employees on the labor market of the host country, fathers/mothers at their homes or sons/daughters/friends in the computer mediated communication with the home country.

- The varieties used in communication include the migrants’ home language(s), vehicular languages from the region of provenience and varieties acquired during the migration experience – a real multilingual toolbox to be used according to necessities.

- Lastly, also the communication channels cover a vast span from hand-written paper strips to e-mail and chat communication.

The data of this research is taken from ethnographic observation and semi-guided interviews in the communities from Bangladesh, the Republic of Moldova and Sri Lanka in the city of Venice.

Keywords: superdiversity, sociolinguistics, migration.